



Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea

Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet

Bark Baskets Created by Robin Reed at Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea

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BEREA, Ky. – On Saturday, Sept. 29, Robin Reed, of Irvine, will demonstrate bark baskets from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea.

Bark, the outermost covering of a tree, is a versatile natural material that for thousands of years has been used to make huts, houses, roofing, buckets, canoes and boats. A self-taught artisan, Reed keeps this tradition alive by creating baskets from the bark he harvests from willow and poplar trees growing along the banks of the Kentucky River and its tributaries, near his rural Estill County home.

When tree bark is freshly harvested, it is moist and supple and can be easily shaped. Reed prefers using poplar and willow trees because they contain a large amount of sap, the presence of which is necessary to separate a tree's bark from the inner wood.

Reed begins his process in spring and early summer when sap content is high, cutting trees with a chain saw, removing the limbs, and slicing through the bark down the length of the tree. Reed uses a hatchet to pry and pull the bark from the tree in one long roll, and then separates the inner and outer bark layers with a draw knife.

The shape of each basket is determined using the patterns and templates Reed has designed to create different basket styles. The outer bark is cut with a knife into a variety of widths and lengths, soaked in water to soften, and folded to shape a basket. After soaking the inner bark in water, Reed cuts it into strips and uses it to stitch each basket together, weaving it through strategically punched holes.

Reed signs and dates each basket, the final step in the creation of an object of utility and beauty – from the bark of a tree – to the garden and home.

Bark baskets by Reed are regularly available at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea, located at 200 Artisan Way, just off Interstate 75 at Berea exit 77. The center's exhibits, shopping and travel information areas are open daily, year-round, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and the cafe is open from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Admission is free.

The center currently features works by more than 650 artisans from 100 counties across the Commonwealth. A special exhibit titled, "The Threads that Bind: Textile Works by Kentucky Artisans," will be on display through Feb. 23, 2013. For more information about the center's programming, call 859-985-5448 or visit the center's website www.kentuckyartisancenter.ky.gov

The Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea is an agency in the Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.



Photos left to right:

Robin Reed creates bark baskets at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea; bark is cut into patterns for a basket; Bark basket with white oak handle and colored reeds by Robin Reed